

Articles

HEIDEGGER AND THE DESTRUCTION OF ONTOLOGY

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(Translated by Wilson Brown)

In §5 of *Grundprobleme der Phänomenologie*, Heidegger discusses the methodological character of ontology. According to this text, the method of ontology is phenomenology, phenomenology itself being characterized by *three basic components (drei Grundstücke)*: the phenomenological reduction, the phenomenological construction and the phenomenological destruction. Heidegger remarks: "In accordance with their very content, reduction, construction and destruction belong together and must be founded in their belonging together" (*Grundprobleme*, p. 31).¹

Ontology, and in this context ontology is for Heidegger the same as philosophy, poses the question about Being. "Being is the genuine theme, the only theme of philosophy" and philosophy is "the theoretical—conceptual interpretation of Being, its structure and its possibilities" (*Grundprobleme*, p. 15). Being is also always the Being of a being, the Being of something that is, and the question about Being must therefore in the first instance and necessarily take its departure from a being. Being is always Being that is understood. "There is Being, only when the understanding of Being, that is, *Dasein*, exists" (*Grundprobleme*, p. 26). The understanding of Being, however, is "not a kind of cognition. Rather, it is the basic determination of existing" (*Grundprobleme*, p. 393). It belongs to the very structure of *Dasein*, that is to say, to the very possibility that there be something to see, something to do and something to say. Without a (preontological) understanding of Being, not a single being would be accessible to us. "No comportment toward beings could exist, which did not understand Being" (*Grundprobleme*, p. 466). And "only in the light of the understanding of Being can we encounter beings as beings" (*Grundprobleme*, p. 390). Neither, however, is an understanding of Being possible apart from a relation to beings. "No understanding of Being would be possible, which were not rooted in a certain comportment toward beings" (*Grundprobleme*, p. 466). Furthermore, Being is always understood in a certain light and against an historically changing horizon of understanding. This light and this horizon form both the conditions for the possibility and the limitation of the understanding of Being. Ontology, therefore, asks about the basic structures and various modifications of the understanding of Being. It also asks about the light and the horizon which

found and delimit this understanding. "What is it that makes this understanding of Being possible?" "Out of what pregiven horizon do we understand something like Being?" (*Grundprobleme*, p. 21). Thus runs the central question of Heidegger's thinking.

With this, the *three components of phenomenology* are given in principle:

1) "Ontological investigation concerns itself initially and necessarily with beings, but is then in a certain manner led away from beings and back to their Being" (*Grundprobleme*, pp. 28–29). Heidegger calls this *leading back from beings to Being* the phenomenological reduction. In doing so, he remarks that he is employing a central term in the phenomenology of Husserl, but only "in respect of the word and not of the thing". Indeed, there is a fundamental and radical difference between the Heideggerian and the Husserlian reduction. Heidegger formulates this difference as follows:

For Husserl, the phenomenological reduction is the method of leading phenomenological viewing from the natural attitude of human involvement in the world of things and persons back to the life of transcendental consciousness and its noetic–noematic processes of experience in which objects are constituted as correlates of consciousness. *For us*, the phenomenological reduction means leading phenomenological viewing from the always differently determined conception of beings back to the understanding of the Being of these beings, back, that is, to the projection of the mode of the unconcealedness of the Being of these beings. (*Grundprobleme*, p. 29)

In other words, for Husserl, *the wonder of wonders* was transcendental subjectivity, "behind which it would be nonsensical to want to investigate further" (*Krisis*, *Hu* VI, p. 192); for Heidegger, the *wonder of wonders* is that beings are (*Nachwort*, *WiM*, pp. 46–47).

2) To be sure, Being and beings are "unveiled equiprimordially" (*Grundprobleme*, p. 456), but "Being is not accessible in the same way as beings. We do not simply find it lying before us. Rather, it must in every case be brought into view by way of a free projection (*Entwurf*)". As Heidegger says, "we designate this projection of pregiven beings against the background of their Being and the structures of their Being as phenomenological construction" (*Grundprobleme*, pp. 29–30). In saying this, we should observe further that every great philosophy is characterized by just such a free projection. As such, every great philosophy is a construction and contains its own '*thesis concerning Being*' (*These über das Sein*).

3) "Because in accordance with its own existence *Dasein* is historical, the possibilities for gaining access to beings and the modes for the interpretation of beings are themselves variable and do in fact vary in different historical situations." Every ontology, including that of Heidegger himself, "is determined by its historical situation and thus at once by certain possibilities for gaining access to beings as well as by the preceding philosophical tradition". For this reason, there

...necessarily belongs to the conceptual interpretation of Being and its structures, that is, to the reductive construction of Being, a *destruction*, that is, a critical dismantling of the concepts which have been handed down to us and which we initially have to employ, a dismantling which proceeds to the sources out of which such concepts have been drawn. Only by way of the destruction can ontology provide itself with full phenomenological assurance of the genuineness of its concepts. (*Grundprobleme*, p. 31)

This phenomenological destruction can perhaps be brought into connection with the Husserlian *epoché*, at least with the *epoché* of the later Husserl, where it is no longer a question of "bracketing the world" but rather of *bracketing* the various interpretations of the world. Here, however, there is once again a great difference between Husserl and Heidegger. For Heidegger, it is not a question of placing the traditional ontology between brackets and still less of annihilating this ontology. Heidegger writes the following: "The destruction does not seek to bury the past in nothingness. It has, rather, a positive intention" (*SZ*, p. 23). The destruction is "neither a negation of the tradition nor a condemnation of the tradition to nothingness. On the contrary, it is precisely a positive appropriation of this tradition" (*Grundprobleme*, p. 31). In the *destruction*, it is a question of freeing oneself *from* the traditional stock of ontological concepts and words which dominate and determine both our thinking and the fulfillment of our humanity — and which do so all the more to the extent that we fail to become aware of and recognize their domination and determination. At the same time, however, it is a question of freeing oneself *for* "the original experiences in which the first and thenceforth leading determinations of Being were gained" (*SZ*, p. 22). As we shall see, the *destruction* is ultimately oriented so as, by means of a structural analysis of factually existing philosophy, to bring attention to precisely what it is that happens whenever a philosophy is built up and formulated, whenever it comes about and is realized. In *What is Philosophy?* one can read the following:

Destruction does not mean demolishing or destroying. Rather, it means dismantling, that is, pulling down, taking apart and setting aside — namely, the merely historical assertions concerning the history of philosophy. Destruction means: opening our ears, freeing ourselves to hear what addresses us in the philosophical tradition as the Being of beings. (*WiP*, pp. 33–34)

Although Heidegger has on several occasions expressed himself with clarity concerning the meaning of the *destruction*, the entire project nevertheless remains somewhat ambiguous. This ambiguity shows itself, as well, in the very term 'destruction' which literally does mean something on the order of destroying. But, in fact, its intention is to be a structural analysis of the tradition. The ambiguity of the entire problematic is also evident from the still prevalent misunderstanding regarding the destruction, which one encounters in most of the interpreters of Heidegger's thinking. It is precisely this situation which has led Derrida, in my view rightly, to prefer the term 'deconstruction'.

In what follows, we shall try to gain some insight into the basic structure of the *destruction*. It is extremely important that we do have insight into this structure, for (1) according to Heidegger, "it is only in the carrying out of the destruction of the ontological tradition that the Being-question attains its true concretion" (*SZ*, p. 26). What precisely the *concretion* (*Konkretion*) consists in must, of course, be clarified. Ultimately, however, as we shall see, the *destruction* and the question about Being coincide to a certain extent. (2) The seed of Heidegger's break with (Husserlian) phenomenology lies in the problematic of the *destruction*. For with Heidegger, the meaning of *die Sache selbst* alters and comes more and more to lie in thinking and what has been thought, in speaking and what has been said, in philosophy as a work, a fact, and so on.

Let us now elaborate somewhat further the problematic of the *destruction*. We shall do so, in the first place, against the background of *fundamental ontology* (*Fundamentalontologie*); secondly, in connection with the problematic of the reduction and the construction and in connection with the *retrieval* (*Wiederholung*) of the Being-question; and finally, in the light of the later work of Heidegger where the problematic of the destruction (*Destruktion*) returns in the form of the *overcoming of metaphysics* (*Überwindung der Metaphysik*), the *return into the ground of metaphysics* (*Rückgang in den Grund der Metaphysik*) (which is, in fact, the title of the later attached foreword to *What is Metaphysics?*), and the *step back* (*Schritt zurück*) "out of metaphysics into the issuant and abiding essence (*Wesen*) of metaphysics", "out of technology into the issuant and abiding essence of technology" or "out of the already thought into an unthought whence what has been thought receives room to issue and abide in its essence" (*ID*, p. 44).

I. Fundamental Ontology

In *Being and Time*, Heidegger formulates the question about Being in the form of a *fundamental ontology*. The purpose of this *fundamental ontology* is twofold and, from the very beginning, also somewhat ambiguous. On the one hand, Heidegger wants to lay (or perhaps lay bare) the foundation for a possible ontology, that is to say, for a meaningful speech concerning beings as beings and concerning the Being of beings. On the other hand, he wants also to provide a fundamental explanation of the already existing ontologies, from Aristotle right up to the present day, not only the factically and explicitly developed ontologies as one encounters them in the great philosophers, but as well the rather more implicit ontologies which are at work in the sciences and in our practical involvement with beings. This fundamental clarification attempts to recover the structure and the origin, the conditions for the possibility and the consequences, the birth certificates and the genealogy of every actual and possible ontology or of every actual and possible '*thesis concerning Being*'. What is at issue is a *fundamental ontology* "out of which", as Heidegger expressly says, "all other ontologies can arise" (*SZ*, p. 13).

We should not forget that Heidegger's thinking seeks to carry out a *retrieval* of the project of Kant. Kant had attempted, on the one hand, to lay the foundation for a possible and accountable metaphysic. He wrote the *prolegomena* "to any future metaphysic which will be able to arise as a science". Kant finds the foundation in the 'I think' (the subject or consciousness) which is essentially dependent upon and referring to experience. On the other hand, Kant also tried to provide a radical explanation of the factual and historically existing metaphysics. According to Kant, these metaphysics are an effect of the *transcendental illusion*, that is, the ineradicable inclination of mankind to think and to reason without testing its thoughts and reasonings anew against experience. Man then constructs all manner of systems and builds elaborated conceptual palaces which are no doubt impressive and attractive but are in fact illusory. Kant will say that such illusions are never wholly to be avoided, because human beings actually have need of illusions in order to be able to live. The illusions can, however, be made harmless. Heidegger will look elsewhere than Kant for the foundation of a possible ontology and the fundamental explanation of all factually existing ontologies. He seeks these in the structure of *Dasein*, understood as essentially *discovering* (*entdeckend*) and *covering over* (*verdeckend*). Nevertheless, he stands squarely within the post-Kantian tradition in which it is part of the task of every philosophical speech to account radically for its own speech and radically to explain all factually existing speech.

In order to build a *fundamental ontology*, therefore, two things are necessary. As Heidegger states it, there is "a twofold task involved in the elaboration of *fundamental ontology*" (SZ, p. 15). A structural analysis of *Dasein* (*Analytik des Daseins*) must be given on the one hand and, on the other hand, a structural analysis of the already existing ontology (*Destruktion der bisherigen Ontologie*). Both the *analysis of Dasein* and the *destruction* are somewhat ambiguous. This ambiguity will later bring Heidegger to formulate the Being-question in a rather different way.

On the one hand, the analysis of *Dasein* is an analysis of human being conceived as *Dasein*. On the other hand, it is an analysis of *Being* insofar as Being is *there*, of the *Sein* that is *Da*, that takes place whenever a human being fulfills its own Being. This analysis yields the so-called existentials. We need not discuss their problematic again here for it is familiar enough. Only the following must be recalled. *Dasein* is structurally characterized by a fundamental openness to the world and to itself (*disclosedness*) (*Erschlossenheit*). This openness, that is to say, the possibility that there be something to do, to see and to say, is of a primarily practical nature. Man is in a position to be involved in a more or less intelligent and understanding way with himself, his fellow men and the things of his environment (*understanding*) (*Verstehen*). Man can also involve himself theoretically with himself and his environment. He can observe and study himself, others and the world. He can develop a science and design theories. This theoretical attitude, however, is always secondary. It is merely one determinate way of more or less intelligent and understanding involvement with oneself and one's world. Such intelligent and under-

standing involvement in or commerce with a world also implies an *understanding of Being* (*Seinsverständnis*), an understanding which is primarily *pre-ontological* (*vor-ontologisch*) but which can be ontologically explicated. Without this *understanding of Being*, there would be nothing to do, to see or to say. "No comportment toward beings could exist, which did not understand Being" (*Grundprobleme*, p. 466). And "only in the light of the understanding of Being can we encounter beings as beings" (*Grundprobleme*, p. 390).

Understanding exhibits a determinate structure. A determinate facticity is interpreted and taken up in the light of a future (*Zukunft*) which comes toward us and is anticipated by us. The whole of human existence consists from moment to moment in a continuous, interpretative taking up of oneself and one's world, and a continuous, anticipative breaking open or holding open of a future. Human existence, therefore, presupposes time as a condition for its possibility.

Furthermore, understanding has a more concrete and better articulated existence in language, particularly in texts or works (whether literary or philosophical), and so in the whole of human institutions, social institutions, human attitudes and modes of human behavior and comportment (for example, technology). Language and word, institution and attitude, all belong to *Dasein*; they are *daseinsmässig*. Through and in all this, the human being fulfills his own Being and Being itself happens, that is, takes place. According to Heidegger, Being does not happen somewhere in the heavens or among the stars. Rather, it takes place precisely there, where man fulfills his humanity, his being-human. As the '*there*' of *Being*, the *Da des Seins*, *Dasein* is the place where Being takes place.

Finally, understanding can be both authentic and inauthentic. It is inauthentic whenever it does not spring from and return to a primordial experience of and a genuine proximity to itself and its world. Such experience and proximity can be ruined by and buried under all manner of traditional formulas and words, concepts and theoretical constructions, existing attitudes and works. These may well have come about — though usually only partially — within a primordial seeing, but in the course of history they have taken on a life of their own and disengaged themselves from experience and proximity. They thus come to be adopted and repeated uncritically, without it being realized exactly what is happening here. Moreover, many concepts and words stemming from a particular domain of experience have become mingled with concepts and words from an entirely different domain of experience. Thus, according to Heidegger, many concepts belonging originally to the world of manufacture (production) have been taken over into areas where there is no talk at all of manufacture. Similarly, many words stemming from the typically Greek world have been 'translated' into Latin and taken over into the entirely different Roman (Christian) world. Finally, there are many words which functioned originally in a religious and theological context but which have slipped over into philosophical speech. None of this, of course, is without consequences. The primordial proximity to oneself and the world has been lost. This is the case, among others, whenever man interprets and conceives himself as a being that is present in the midst of other beings, whenever he interprets and conceives the world as a

totality of beings spread out before him as a sort of spectacle and whenever he understands *Being (Sein)* as a being (*Seiendes*), as “permanent presence” (“*ständige Anwesenheit*”) (*EM*, p. 154), or in an ontotheological framework.

One may not, however, think too simplistically about primordial experience and genuine proximity, for human Being is by its very nature interpretative and it is always already interpreted Being just as the world is always an already interpreted world. Outside the interpretative taking up and projecting of oneself and the world, there can be no talk of either a meaningful existence or a meaningful world. Primordial experience and genuine proximity must therefore be conceived as an experience of and a proximity to this interpretative taking up and projecting, or as an experience of and a proximity to the very fulfilling of human Being. It is not a proximity to present beings but a proximity to the happening that takes place whenever human Being fulfills its existence. In the *Prolegomena zur Geschichte des Zeitbegriffs* (Volume 20, lectures from 1925) Heidegger writes the following:

It is simply a matter of fact ..., that our most straightforward perceptions and conceptions are already expressed and, what is more, in a certain way already interpreted. We do not primarily and originally see objects and things; rather, we initially speak about them. More precisely, we do not say what we see regarding objects and things; on the contrary, we see in such things merely what one commonly says about them. This characteristic determinateness of the world and the possibility of apprehending and comprehending the world in virtue of this expressness, in virtue of certain things already having been said and discussed, is ... precisely what must be brought fundamentally into view. (p. 75)

The text just cited deals primarily with the problematic of *categorical intuition (kategoriale Anschauung)*, a problematic of Husserl which was of the greatest importance for Heidegger in formulating the Being-question. Unfortunately, we cannot go into that matter here. It is, however, important to understand that it is Heidegger's concern to think the fulfillment of human Being, *Dasein*, as *speaking* and to inquire about the Being (*Sein*) of that distinctive being (*Seiendes*) “which is speaking itself” (*Prolegomena*, p. 203). Phenomenology is, therefore, “neither a philosophy of intuition nor a philosophy of the immediate” as Rickert had supposed. According to Heidegger, Rickert had utterly failed to grasp the meaning of phenomenology. “In the demand for an ultimate and direct givenness of the phenomena there is implied no such comfort as that of an immediate viewing” (*Prolegomena*, pp. 120–21).

On the basis of the foregoing, it should be clear what the *destruction* is at the level of fundamental ontology. As formulated in the *Prolegomena*, destruction is “a letting-see which lays bare and which is to be taken in the sense of a methodically conducted dismantling of all (accidental and necessary) coverings-over (*Verdeckungen*)” (*Prolegomena*, pp. 118–19). In the *Grundprobleme*, we read the following description of the destruction: Destruction is “a critical dismantling of the concepts which have been handed down to us and which we initially have to

employ, a dismantling which proceeds to the sources out of which such concepts have been drawn" (*Grundprobleme*, p. 31). It is a question of freeing ourselves from something, which — at least initially — we can neither do without nor get outside of. This liberation cannot come about by denying or refuting the factually existing philosophies. Still less can it occur by acting as if no one has ever philosophized before. There is no philosophical nullpoint and it is simply impossible to begin all over again. It is even the case, on the one hand, that the already existing philosophies weigh upon us as a burden and dominate our thinking — all the more so in the degree that we fail to become aware of and recognize this domination as such. On the other hand, however, it is precisely the philosophical tradition which makes our own thinking possible. Without a tradition there could be no philosophy. The factually existing philosophies form a part of our reality. As philosophies, they belong to *Dasein*. But the emancipation of philosophy can only consist in tracking down the way in which philosophy is even possible and first comes about, what is revealed and concealed in and by philosophy, what is excluded and forgotten in and by philosophy, what displacements and alterations have arisen within philosophy, how philosophy functions in our world and what it accomplishes and has accomplished. One must ask oneself what precisely happens whenever philosophy or a philosophy is constituted, makes an appearance, becomes public, is built up and expanded, comes to completion and eventually goes to its end. The basic question of Heideggerian thinking runs as follows: What precisely takes place when philosophizing occurs? More concretely, Heidegger says, for example, near the end of his book on Kant and in regard to his interpretation of Kant: Our task is "to inquire not about what Kant says but about what it is that *happens* in the course of his attempt to lay a foundation (for metaphysics). The foregoing interpretation of the *Critique of Pure Reason* aims exclusively at laying bare this *happening*" (*KM*, p. 193). He says nearly the same thing regarding his interpretations of Schelling and Hegel, Leibniz and Descartes. Stated more generally, Heidegger poses questions such as "What is metaphysics?" and "What is philosophy?" in which the *is* must be understood transitively, just as he himself remarks (*WiP*, p. 22). What is it that happens in philosophy? What makes philosophy be what it is and be such as it is? Or, as Heidegger puts it, "*Was heisst Denken?*" where *heissen* means something like 'command', 'call up', 'summon into existence', 'provide direction', and so on. For Heidegger, asking what precisely happens when philosophizing occurs coincides with posing the question about Being, the question about the Being of that distinctive being which is philosophy. The *destruction of ontology* and the Being-question belong to each other. Let us attempt to elucidate this in another manner.

II. The Question about Being

Being is always the Being of being. The question about the Being of beings "can be asked in respect of *every* being" (*Prolegomena*, p. 186). Nevertheless it is not a matter of indifference which being one selects as a model or as a point of departure.

According to Heidegger, it is striking that in asking the question about Being the entire tradition tends to take its departure from things which one can represent to oneself and observe, from objects which in one manner or another have been manufactured (produced) or possibly even from a highest being "in which", as one is perhaps inclined to suppose, "the idea of Being in general is realized in the most genuine sense" (*Prolegomena*, p. 233). The choice of such exemplars is not without consequences for the answer to the question about Being or, better stated, with this choice it is presupposed that the question has already been answered. Therefore Heidegger takes another example as a model or as a point of departure for the Being-question. In the very first paragraphs of *Being and Time*, Heidegger speaks of the "ontic and ontological priority of the Being-question". Though it is usually forgotten, this has a twofold meaning. It means that in philosophy the question about Being deserves priority above all other questions: "Being is the genuine theme, the only theme of philosophy" (*Grundprobleme*, p. 15). It also means, however, that, *as a question*, the question about Being is the being *par excellence* which must serve as the point of departure for the question about the Being of beings. In the *Prolegomena*, Heidegger writes the following: "questioning itself is a being (*Seiendes*)" (*Prolegomena*, p. 199). What must be done? We must "lay bare questioning as a being, that is, we must lay bare *Dasein* itself" (*Prolegomena*, p. 200). Stated differently, our task is to ask about the Being (*Sein*) of that distinctive being (*Seiendes*) "which is speaking itself" (*Prolegomena*, p. 203). Speaking, and therefore also questioning and answering, is "just as *Dasein* is, that is, it exists" (*Grundprobleme*, p. 296). It was from Husserl that Heidegger first learned to regard a question (and also an answer) as a being, and it was Heidegger's view that this way of regarding questions and answers belongs to the essence of phenomenology. Husserl, however, neglected to inquire about the Being of such a being (*Prolegomena*, p. 157). This was, furthermore, no "mere omission or oversight of a question which should have been posed" (*Prolegomena*, p. 178). Rather, it hangs together with "the history of *Dasein* itself" or with "the kind of happening characteristic of *Dasein*" (*Prolegomena*, p. 179).

For Heidegger, the concern is to approach philosophy as a network of questions and answers, as a *work of language*, as a being, and then to ask oneself what the Being (*Sein*) of this work (being, *Seiendes*) is, what precisely happens in and through this work. The approach to philosophy as a work, and above all as a *work of language*, occurs most explicitly in *The Origin of the Work of Art*. This essay deals not only with art as a work but also with philosophy as a work. In addition to the work of art, the following are named as works: "the deed which founds a state", "the nearness of that, which is not simply a being, but is rather the uttermost being of all beings (*das Seiendste des Seienden*)", "the essential sacrifice", and "the questioning that belongs to a thinking which, as the thinking of Being, names Being in its questionworthiness" (*Holzwege*, p. 50). Elsewhere, namely in the *Introduction to Metaphysics*, a text which was written at approximately the same time as *The Origin of the Work of Art*, Heidegger offers the following enumeration of works: "the work of the word as poetry, the work of stone in the temple and

the statue, the work of the word as thinking, the work of the *πῶλος* as the historical place which founds and preserves all this" (*EM*, p. 146). Heidegger adds to this list the following characterization: "In accordance with what was said earlier, 'work' is always to be understood here in the Greek sense as *ἔργον*, as the presence that has been set forth into unconcealedness." Immediately preceding the enumeration of different forms of work we find the following utterance: "Unconcealedness comes about only insofar as it is brought about, worked out of concealedness (*erwirkt*), by the work." In accordance with the familiar words from *The Origin of the Work of Art*, it is said of every work, even of philosophy, that it is "the setting itself into work of truth." As a work, philosophy is a "work of truth". Heidegger remarks here that such expressions are distinguished by an essential ambiguity, because "truth is once a 'subject' and again an 'object'", albeit "both characterizations remain inappropriate" (*Holzwege*, p. 64). The work is the bringing about of unconcealedness (*ἀλήθεια*) and unconcealedness takes place only in and through the work. At the same time, the work is also brought about, worked out into the open (*bewirkt*) by truth as unconcealedness. This holds in an exemplary fashion for philosophy as a work or for the *thinking of Being*, where the genitive is just as well a *genitivus objectivus* as a *genitivus subjectivus* and the words 'subjective' and 'objective' are likewise inadequate.

To be sure, this is not the only thing that Heidegger says concerning the work in *The Origin of the Work of Art*. It would be well worth the effort to take up anew Heidegger's text on art as a work and read it sentence for sentence as a text on *philosophy* as a work. In doing so, one should pay particular attention to what Heidegger says in his later *Addendum*:

The entire treatise 'The Origin of the Work of Art' moves knowingly, though not expressly, upon the path of the question concerning the issuant and abiding essence of Being. The attempt to situate the sense (*Besinnung*) of what *art* (philosophy) is, is determined entirely and decisively by the question about *Being*. (*Holzwege*, Gesamtausg. 5, p. 73)

Such a rereading is, of course, not possible here. We can, however, make a few remarks in respect of the possibility of approaching philosophy as a work, taking our lead from *The Origin of the Work of Art*.

It can first of all be said negatively that one should avoid three things: (1) viewing the work that philosophy is, purely as a product of man; (2) viewing the work in the light of the conception of truth as adequation, that is to say, thinking that philosophy is a more or less adequate rendition or representation of a reality given outside philosophy; (3) viewing the work as a sign or a network of signs which is supposed to signify a reality given outside the work. Whenever one conceives and approaches philosophy in this manner, one is already the victim of precisely that ontology which Heidegger attempts to subject to a *destruction*, that is, one is a victim of what Heidegger calls metaphysical thinking.

It can then be said positively that every great philosophy is a structure, a work

of building (*Bauwerk*), a construction. As a construction, it is not a depiction or representation of the world; On the contrary, it founds and establishes a world. The constructed work of philosophy, a philosophical text stands there just as the temple at Paestum stands there, and in standing there it opens a world, offers a view to men and gods, and lets things become visible. Philosophy is a place where reality comes at once to be unveiled and veiled. It is precisely on the basis of this veiling and unveiling that there is something on the order of what we call world. The constructed work that is philosophy cannot exist without man, but it is not merely the product of man. Constructing a philosophy is, above all things, a matter of receiving and standing open, perceiving and listening. In a certain sense, philosophy constitutes itself. At the same time, philosophy is not a *creatio ex nihilo*. A philosophy is necessarily built up out of a pregiven material. This material is not the stone, the pigment, the color, as in architecture or painting. Rather, it is the words as in poetry. As Heidegger constantly emphasized, from the earliest *Marburg Lectures* to his latest publications, these words may not be understood as signs. The word is not a sign. It does not signify something which would be given or present somewhere outside and surrounding the word. As Heidegger says in *What is Called Thinking?*, the issuant and abiding essence of saying does not allow itself to be determined on the basis of the sign-character of the word (*WD*, p. 123). Saying (*Sagen*) is showing (*Zeigen*). Heidegger goes so far as to contend that the moment in which the word shifted from being *something that shows* (*Zeigendes*) to being a *sign* (*Zeichen*) was one of the most decisive moments in the history of truth, the history of the understanding of truth as agreement or correspondence and of Being as “permanent presence” (“*ständige Anwesenheit*”). In *The Origin of the Work of Art*, we read the following:

Where no language issues and abides (*west*) ... there can be no openness of the being (*des Seienden*) and in consequence no openness of the not-being (*des Nichtseienden*) and of the void. When language names the being (*das Seiende*) for the first time, such naming first brings that being (*Seiendes*) to expression, that is, to the word and to appearance. This naming first nominates the being (*das Seiende*) to its Being (*Sein*) from its Being (*Sein*). (*Holzwege*, p. 60)

Elsewhere, Heidegger says the following: “Things first come to be and are in the word, in language” (*EM*, p. 11). “Language first grants and warrants the possibility of standing in the midst of the openness of the beings (*des Seienden*)” (*EHD*, p. 35) and “did our ek-sistent essence not stand in the power of language, then all beings (*Seiende*) would remain closed off to us: the being that we ourselves are, no less than the beings that we ourselves are not” (*EM*, p. 63). What is said here concerning language holds in exemplary fashion for the language of poets and thinkers and for the *work of language* that is philosophy and poetry. This, therefore, is the meaning of the constantly returning sentence in *The Origin of the Work of Art*: “The work is the setting itself into work of truth.” To the material out of which a philosophy is necessarily built up belong the fragments and passages which are and must be

taken over from other works. No single work, no single text, ever stands wholly upon itself. It always refers to other texts upon which this one depends. A text is always taken up into a "context of meanings" ("*Bedeutungszusammenhang*") or a "totality of references (*Verweisungsganzheit*), which is constitutive for worldliness (*Weltlichkeit*) itself" (SZ, p. 76). The network of references to other works is a condition for the possibility of both the origination and the understanding of a work. At the same time, it forms the greatest obstacle to this understanding and constitutes its limitation. Thus, Heidegger writes the following:

the thinking of the modern epoch is much more difficult of access than the thinking of the Greeks, for the writings and works of the modern thinkers are structured differently, are more multilayered, are pervaded by tradition and are always engaged in the controversy with Christianity. (SG, p. 123)

On the basis of this "complicated state of affairs", philosophy runs the risk of becoming mere "idle talk" and being utterly unintelligible, which is to say, instead of *discovering* (*entdeckend*), doing nothing but *covering over* (*verdeckend*).

Because philosophy is a *construction* (*Konstruktion*) it can also be subjected to a *destruction* (*Destruktion*), or better, to a de-construction, an activity through which the internal structure and the constitutive elements of factual philosophy are brought to light. Such activity is ultimately oriented toward trying to direct attention to the unthought (*das Ungedachte*) in thinking and to the unsaid in saying. The expressions "the unthought" and "the unsaid" are again somewhat ambiguous and it is not always easy accurately to distinguish the different meanings which these expressions can have for Heidegger. The unthought or the unsaid can be that which was never expressly thematized although it was continuously presupposed in (philosophical) thinking and which, indeed, *can* be thought and said. To this meaning belong the enduring, constantly returning, and historically changing structures of philosophy (such as its ontotheological character). The unthought or unsaid can also be that which is essentially, and always remains, unthought and unsaid, yet which at the same time is constitutive for every thinking and every saying. This unthought or unsaid never passes over into the realm of the thought or the said. It even waxes and becomes greater in the degree that more and more comes to be thought and said. Heidegger writes the following:

The greater the work of thinking which claims a thinker ... the richer will be the unthought in this work of thinking, that is, the richer will be that which comes forth first and only in this work of thinking as the not-yet-thought. This unthought, of course, has nothing to do with something which a thinker has overlooked or failed to master and which posterity, because it understands such matters much better, will have to make up for. (SG, pp. 123–24)

The unthought in a philosophy constitutes that philosophy and its greatness, just as the forgottenness of Being (*Seinsvergessenheit*) is constitutive for metaphysics and

its greatness.

Attention can be directed toward the unthought in thinking only by way of an accurate analysis of what in fact happens when thinking takes place, when something comes to be thought. Attention can be directed toward the unsaid in philosophy only by way of an accurate analysis of what in fact takes place in and through philosophy, that is to say, by means of the *destruction*. Here it is a question of a *return into the ground of metaphysics* (*WM*, Foreword) or a seeking "after the condition for the possibility of the understanding of Being where this understanding is to be regarded as such" (*Grundprobleme*, p. 399). It is a question of a *step back* (*Schritt zurück*) "out of metaphysics into the issuant and abiding essence of metaphysics" (*ID*, p. 47), "out of the already thought into an unthought whence what has been thought receives room to issue and abide in its essence" (*ID*, p. 44). "The *step back* does not refer to an isolated step of thinking, but rather to the whole style of the movement of thinking and to a long path" (*ID*, p. 46). It is a question of trying to get the factually existing philosophies and factually existing thinking before oneself as a *Gegenüber* and then to ask what is factually consummated there.

This is a central theme in the later Heidegger, but it is already fully and clearly expressed in *Grundprobleme der Phänomenologie*, for instance in those passages where Heidegger speaks about Hegel. Heidegger says of Hegel that he saw everything which there is to see and thought everything which there is to think. With Hegel, philosophy is "in a certain sense thought to the end" (*Grundprobleme*, p. 400). Heidegger remarks, moreover, that Hegel was able to see so much "because he possessed an unusual power over language and wrested the concealed things from their hiding place" (*Grundprobleme*, p. 266). According to Heidegger, however, Hegel did not pose the question about the light in which he was able to see what he saw, and think what he thought; he did not ask precisely what happens when something comes to be spoken and what makes possible every understanding and every understanding of Being. According to a striking and remarkable formulation in *Grundprobleme der Phänomenologie*, to pose such a question is "to question forth and beyond Being", it is "to go forth beyond Being toward the light out of and into which Being itself comes into the luminous brilliance of an understanding" (*Grundprobleme*, p. 400). This formulation no longer appears in the later Heidegger, but we gather from it that Heidegger perceives himself to be dwelling in the neighborhood of Plato and his ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας (*Grundprobleme*, pp. 401–5). This is, finally, the problem of the *difference* (*Differenz*), the *difference* which is and remains essentially unthought and unsaid, but which at the same time is constitutive for every thinking and saying, for every understanding and every understanding of Being, and which makes all this possible. This *difference* can only be 'discovered' in an activity or a movement of thinking which, during the period of *Being and Time*, Heidegger called "destruction".

NOTE

1. My quotations are from the following works of Heidegger:

Grundprobleme der Phänomenologie, Gesamtausgabe Bd. 24. Frankfurt a.M.: Klostermann, 1975. (*Grundprobleme*)

Was ist das – die Philosophie? Pfullingen: Neske, 1956. (*WiP*)

Sein und Zeit. Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1957. (*SZ*)

Was ist Metaphysik? Frankfurt a.M.: Klostermann, 1955. (*WiM*)

Identität und Differenz. Pfullingen: Neske, 1957. (*ID*)

Prolegomena zur Geschichte des Zeitbewusstseins, Gesamtausgabe Bd. 20. Frankfurt a.M.: Klostermann, 1979. (*Prolegomena*)

Kant und das Problem der Metaphysik. Frankfurt a.M.: Klostermann, 1951. (*KM*)

Der Ursprung des Kunstwerks, in *Holzwege*. Frankfurt a.M.: Klostermann, 1972.

Holzwege, Gesamtausgabe Bd. 5. Frankfurt a.M.: Klostermann, 1977.

Was heisst Denken? Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1954. (*WD*)

Erläuterungen zu Hölderlins Dichtung. Frankfurt a.M.: Klostermann, 1951. (*EHD*)

Der Satz vom Grund. Pfullingen: Neske, 1958. (*SG*)